



*The Window to Our World*

**PHYLLIS TUCKER VINSON JACKSON**  
**Executive Vice President**  
**WORLD AFRICAN NETWORK**

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As one of the founding partners and executive vice president of World African Network, Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson heads the Network's programming division, directing program acquisition and original production for the 24-hour pay cable network.

Working closely with her husband, Eugene D. Jackson, chairman and chief executive officer of World African Network, Tucker Vinson Jackson is developing a comprehensive mix of classic and contemporary movies, Pan-African films, documentaries, children's programming, concerts and news and information. She will oversee original productions for the network which will initially be comprised of interstitial programming-- wraparounds and lead-ins to regularly scheduled programming that will provide a unique perspective for the network's primary target audience of 7 million African American cable television households and the African households on continent.

Prior to joining World African Network, Tucker Vinson Jackson was vice president, children's and family programming, for NBC Entertainment. Credited with helping the network to obtain a "number one" rating in the Saturday morning time period, Tucker Vinson Jackson achieved the longest winning streak of any daypart in network television with such programs as "Smurfs," "Alvin and the Chipmunks" and "Mr. T."

Her rise through the network ranks began in 1971 from a secretarial position at NBC. Appointed manager, variety programs, in 1977, she was

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## **Pg. 2/ P. Jackson Bio**

involved in the creative supervision of "The Richard Pryor Show" and "The New Laugh In." Her appointment also gave her the distinction of being the first African American broadcast network executive in television history. In 1978, she was promoted to manager, current dramatic programming, responsible for the creative supervision of "Little House on the Prairie," "Chips" and "The Wonderful World of Disney." During this period, Tucker Vinson Jackson developed a well-deserved reputation in the television industry for her creative success with programs for young viewers, which led to another promotion in 1979, when she was named director, children's programs.

Tucker Vinson Jackson made television history again when she became the first African American woman to reach the level of vice president in programming. In 1981, she was promoted again to vice president of children's programming for the network.

During her rise up the network ladder, Tucker Vinson Jackson has received numerous accolades from her peers, including "Career Woman of the Year" from the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, the NAACP "Medgar Evers Community Service Award" for Outstanding Achievement in Communications and Community Service and the "Newsmaker Award" from the National Association of Media Women. Tucker Vinson Jackson was also named "Black Woman of Achievement," from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and was one of "America's Top 100 Business and Professional women" according *Dollars & Sense* magazine in 1985.

A graduate of California State University at Los Angeles, Tucker Vinson Jackson resides in Los Angeles with her husband and four of their eight children.

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## Summary of Comments Submitted by Phyllis Jackson

### FCC En Banc Hearing on Children's Television

- Children are this country's most valuable natural resource. As the Federal Communications Commission goes about the very important business of defining children's informational and educational programming several issues should remain in the forefront of this process:
- Television can and does impact perceptions, attitudes, learning and yes behavior, particularly in children.
- As such television has the potential to be a wonderfully positive teaching tool as well as dangerous, harmful and menacing.
- Those of us involved in communications can choose which it will be. It is a relatively small group of decision makers who will make that determination. Television is not simply what we see, it's a representation of the psyche of those who determine the subject, content and editorial leaning of what we see.
- Almost all children will be exposed to television before they are exposed to the world, consequently the first introduction children have to ethnic groups outside of their own is most likely to be through this medium.
- For children's programming to properly educate and to provide accurate information, it is vital that the creators and producers of such programming be

representative and inclusive of the variety ethnic groups the programming will reach.

- Television often passively communicates negative messages by omission. Under representation is itself a kind of negative stereotyping since invisibility of a group suggests unimportance.
- Though it is generally considered economically prohibitive, it is important that there be programming specifically targeting children of color which addresses cultural significance of particular ethnic groups. World African Network has been formed to challenge the notion that television that presents the full spectrum of African American and African life isn't in demand.
- WAN will present entertainment and informational programming for the entire family, with cultural sensitivity to the needs of children of color.

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### **Media Stereotypes and the Effect on Children**

Children are world's most important asset. I come today as an African American woman who is very concerned with how people of color are portrayed in the media and what impact this has on children and the world. I am particularly concerned since almost all children are exposed to television long before they are exposed to the world. Most children have their initial introduction to other ethnic groups through this important medium. This is also the medium that will most likely provide children with their first introduction to members of their own ethnic group outside of their family. Television many times provides their first glimpse of negative stereotypes about people within their own racial group.

I come here today to talk to you about mass media from the perspective of an African American woman with twenty-two years of experience in the entertainment industry, eleven of which was spent in children's programming. During my early career in research I spent time learning how children watch television.

When we speak of media we are not only speaking about the channels upon which television is seen, but the content of the media as well as the people behind the media. Just think, there are a relative few people making decisions about what billions of people around the world see. For children's television to properly educate, and to provide accurate teaching, it is vital that the creators and producers of such programming be representative and inclusive of the variety of ethnic groups that children's programming reaches.

Television is one of the most significant inventions of the media affecting human behavior and perception. Television is very subtle, it presents models to our children. It socializes, it presents lifestyles, it influences opinions, it forms attitudes, it molds minds. It will tell you what to think and whom to think about.

Most children watch television for entertainment. And while those who control television have the very best intentions, though subtle, television can be a very dangerous, harmful and menacing tool. It is a tremendous source of information which influences the formation of attitudes toward ethnic groups through its news reporting and characterizations of people of color. Media can perpetuate racial prejudice and stereotypic attitudes by its portrayal isolated innocents and omission of positive facts about people of different racial groups.

Stereotypes are generalizations about groups of people that we use to simplify the world. They are a necessary part of everyday thinking, the positive as well as negative. Problems arise from the use of negative and demeaning stereotypes perpetuated through characters created by those with limited experiences with people of color.

When a negative characteristic is attributed repeatedly to a group of people or character in the media, the end result is that the negative characteristic becomes a new stereotype about that ethnic group through the character portrayed.

Children of color can personally be harmed by repeated exposure to false and negative stereotypes of their own racial group portrayed in the media. Because they are in the process of forming their identity, viewing negative stereotypes can lead them to think of themselves and their ethnic group in the same negative stereotypical terms they see characters portrayed on television. This is particularly so if the character portrayed is from a different socioeconomic group.

With the best of intentions to include persons of color in children's television, one character from an ethnic or racial group is cast in a predominately white series. The presence of a token minority-- such as one African American or Latino -- can do more harm than good.

Research indicates that a solo person of color among an all white cast is likely viewed as the sole representative of his ethnic group and therefore any characteristics this character has become representative of his entire ethnic group. If the character reacts a certain way (i.e., rolling eyes, or slapping a high five) the effect of this one character repeating this behavior week after week often leads viewers to one to conclude that all

people in this ethnic group behave in this manner, especially if the viewer is young and impressionable.

This solo character is most often not the lead in the show, rarely, if ever, has equal status and usually, through various other minor attributes, is the funny person. This results in low status and thus this characteristic becomes representative of the ethnic group the character portrays. The way to avoid this is to cast more than one person from any ethnic or racial group, and have at least one of them portrayed positively, interacting with the majority characters with equal status.

Then there is the opposite problem of under-representation or complete absence of people of color. This is a type of stereotyping in itself, since the invisibility of a group sends the subtle but clear message that the **invisible group** is unimportant.

And with all of this negativity, African Americans watch 50% more television than whites and are 35-40% more likely to tune in a program in which an African American appears or co-stars.

World African Network (WAN) has been formed to serve this under served audience. WAN will be a pay cable service with the philosophy and goal to provide programs which will not only entertain but will uplift, inform and inspire the worldwide African community. We are particularly interested in providing programs with positive role models for children.

Our schedule will provide a 24 hour schedule of programs for the African American audience. We will have a schedule of news, documentary movies, Pan-African films, comedies, situation comedies, sports, children's programs, programs of interest to children -- all from an African and African American perspective. Our channel will have a national as well as international appearance. We believe it is important for children to attain positive self image through the media. They have to see themselves in positive roles. They have to look back into their past in order to understand who they are and develop self determination and strength from positive images. And while this service is directed to the African American community it will offer positive portrayals of African Americans and African people world wide for all children to view.

WAN will provide a more realistic and diverse portrayal of African people from all parts of the world. Our goal is control of our own images, providing positive stereotypes for African Americans. We will eventually own and produce our own television programs in which African people have leading roles and interact with whites in superior and equal status relationships to counteract the often negative stereotypes that African people are inferior to whites and demonstrate that members of different racial and ethnic groups can interact successfully. This will be a step forward in teaching children that people with mutual respect can live and work together successfully.

We plan to present ethnic characters in a manner which demonstrates cultural and ethnic differences. Children need to know that African Americans have a heritage that goes back well before slavery, one they can be proud of and feel good about. Our African American girls will be provided with programs that reflects the beautiful they learn in their own home and community which will be conveyed to the larger society that African beauty is ideal and beauty she can be proud of.

Children are primarily affected by family interaction patterns, but through watching television they are effected by the perceptions of other ethnic or racial groups. And since television is controlled by the few and given to the masses it is important that television decision makers be reflective of the multicultural audience for whom the programs are intended. It is thus very important for African people as well as various people of our multicultural country to participate in the formulation of television programming and characters.

Thank you.